

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-1BALTIMORE SUN  
5 SEPTEMBER 1979

# Soviet units in Cuba may peril SALT

By HENRY L. TREWHITT  
Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee warned yesterday that the Senate may reject or modify the strategic arms limitation (SALT) treaty unless Soviet combat troops are removed from Cuba.

"I hoped that we could keep the two [issues] separate," Senator Frank Church (D., Idaho), the committee chairman, said in a television interview. "I want the Senate to judge SALT on its merits."

But if a Soviet combat unit remains, he said, and if Moscow insists on "turning Cuba into a kind of Russian base, then I think the Senate won't sit still for it."

Mr. Church scheduled a special hearing for today on the administration's report that combat troops have joined Russian advisers in Cuba. With that the planned resumption of hearings on ratification of the SALT treaty took a turn that could affect the future of the pact.

Mr. Church warned of possible linkage between SALT ratification and removal of Soviet troops as the administration reaffirmed its position against such linkage. At both the White House and the State Department, spokesmen said the treaty deserves approval on its own merits.

But the administration clearly expects linkage sentiment to grow as senators returned to Washington from their August recess. President Carter discussed the problem with senior foreign policy advisers yesterday, then they met separately to consider how to deal with a trend that could doom SALT.

The group included Cyrus R. Vance, the Secretary of State; Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President's national security adviser; Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense; and Adm. Stansfield Turner, the director of central intelligence. What they decided was not announced.

Jody Powell, the President's press secretary, said merely that the administration still believes SALT should be approved regardless of Soviet behavior on other issues. Otherwise he referred questions to a press conference scheduled by Mr. Vance for 11 A.M. today.

For his part, Mr. Church, whose committee has primary Senate jurisdiction over the treaty, deferred routine SALT hearings scheduled for today in order to concentrate on the Soviet military pres-

"demands the committee's in

Admiral Turner and David D. Newsom, under secretary of state for political affairs, had been expected to appear before the committee yesterday. Their testimony was postponed, however, because of the White House meeting.

Instead they will testify in secret this morning. And in the afternoon Mr. Vance will testify, also in a closed session, following his press conference.

Mr. Church said in a statement he expects to deal with the whole range of questions raised by Soviet activity in Cuba. His militance was an unmistakable warning of the danger to SALT, for he had been regarded as a supporter of the treaty with only relatively minor reservations.

There could be no justification for Soviet combat troops in Cuba, he said, and their presence revealed the shallowness of President Fidel Castro's claim to lead non-aligned nations.

The issue, which erupted with only faint advance warning last Friday, was an unexpected complication for the SALT treaty. Signed in June, the treaty would fix ceilings on the long-range, or strategic, nuclear launchers each of the superpowers could deploy.

It was under severe attack by defense-oriented members of the Senate even before the latest challenge developed. But the administration appeared to have a good chance of obtaining ratification by committing more money to defense.

Whether they are still good is uncertain. Already several influential senators, including Mr. Church, have demanded the removal of Soviet combat troops from Cuba, with at least an implied linkage to SALT.

Mr. Church himself broke the news last Thursday that 2,000 to 3,000 Soviet combat troops were in Cuba. He did so after the State Department briefed key members of the Senate about its latest analysis of growing Soviet strength.

The administration confirmed the report the next day, saying the total Soviet military presence in Cuba had remained as many as 5,000 men. Only recently, spokesmen said, the distinction between advisers and combat troops had become clear.

The acknowledgment was a severe embarrassment to the administration.

On July 27, Mr. Vance told Senator Richard B. Stone (D., Fla.) the administration had no evidence of a substantial increase in Soviet troops on the island.

Precisely why the administration chose to announce its re-evaluation last week was not clear from the public record. The timing caused speculation that the United States hoped to embarrass Mr. Castro before the conference of so-called nonaligned nations that began Monday in Havana.

But informed officials said the announcement came naturally: the evidence finally was clear, and there was concern that it would be leaked by others if the administration failed to notify the Senate.

Senator Stone, for one, had remained dissatisfied with earlier assurances. Administration officials suggest that Mr. Stone had reliable, independent sources of intelligence in his constituency of Cuban exiles.

Most speculation about the early consequences of the disclosure concern SALT. Although there is no formal link between the issues, and although the Soviet presence violates no commitment to the United States, it provides an obvious weapon to those who regard SALT as a sign of American weakness.

CONTINUED